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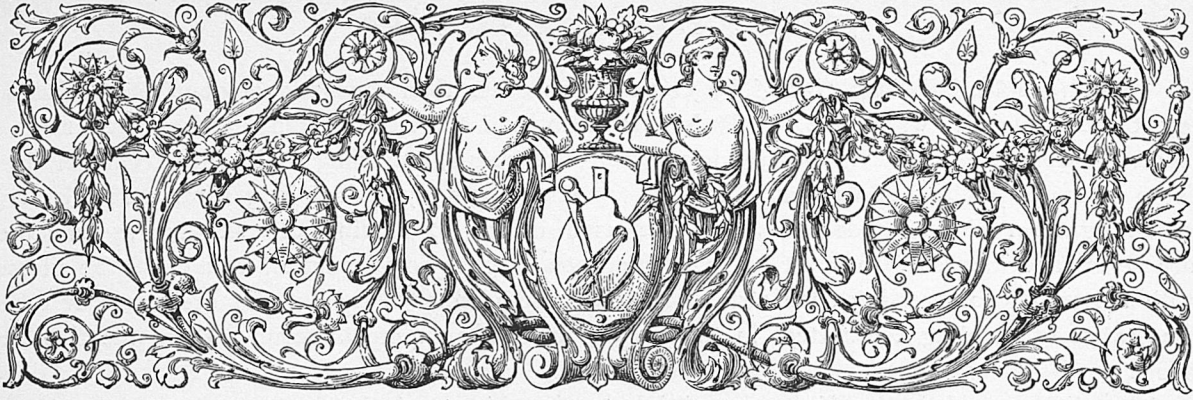
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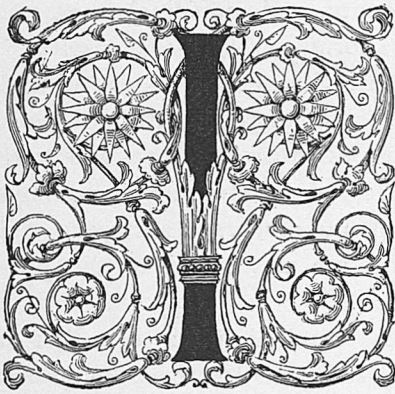
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DESIGNED FOR THE AMERICAN ART REVIEW BY LUDVIG S. IPSEN.

# ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF ARCHITECTURAL ART IN THE WESTERN STATES.

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DESIGNED BY L. S. IPSEN.

IF the development of architectural art in particular localities were not controlled by circumstances peculiar to those localities, there would be no occasion for considering Western architecture by itself, rather than as part of a great national revival. To a certain extent only, the influences which have been at work upon our national architecture for the last twenty years have been similar in the various sections of the country, so far as they have been *American*, and peculiar to the national tendencies of thought. Government architecture, however, or that of the buildings erected by the Treasury Department for the various government offices, when ordered by appropriations, and pretty generally scattered, is exceptional, and bears the impress of having emanated from a central controlling office. These buildings are such as those who are in charge of that office consider to be appropriate to their several purposes, and their style and construction vary according to the taste and ability of those who happen to be in power for the time being. As they are built to last for ages, they will undoubtedly exert some influence, good or bad, upon the education of public taste; and it is only in so far as they exert such an influence that they can have any relation, near or remote, to national architectural progress, or have any tendency to unify national thought. They are in no sense evidences of the national taste. Their design can be controlled or influenced by but one man, the Secretary of the Treasury for the time being. And as that man is either a politician or statesman, or both, and little else, he is not likely to know anything about the matter of which he has supreme control; and generally has enough good sense, under the circumstances, to let the architectural office work out its own problems in its own way. The communities for whose use these buildings are erected have no voice or influence in the designing of them; the architects of those localities have no opportunity to contribute towards the work, and there is not even a central architectural authority, or board of appeals, by whom questions affecting the architecture of national public buildings may be determined. Hence the buildings erected by the government, while they may display some uniform characteristics in different sections of the country, cannot be regarded as examples of a national architecture.

It is in public buildings erected by communities other than the national government that we see those tendencies which are peculiarly American, and therefore tending, as has been said, to a certain degree of likeness, but differing in essential points, according to locality. One of these is to pile up public buildings in the centre, making them pyramidal in general profile by surmounting them with high domes, which are used mainly to obtain bold sky-lines; while they are as often evidences of a spirit of rivalry between neighboring localities, which may be blessed with the means for erecting such structures, and seldom enhance the interior usefulness or effect. The tastes of building committees in this respect have been quite uniform, both in the East and West.

The difference between Eastern and Western architectural development is mainly due to differences in the average culture of the two sections. Until recently it has been affected by a difference in monetary resources. This has been seen more in public than in private buildings. But at present the West is quite as lavish as the East in appropriations for State, county, and city buildings.

Architectural progress in the West has not been the same with all classes of structures; and the reason for this is, that uniform architectural talent is not employed on public and private work. As a rule, the public buildings in the West have employed inferior talent, and private ones have had the best available. Therefore, to intelligently understand the present condition of the art, public and private buildings must be considered separately.

Public buildings naturally comprise those erected for State, county, and municipal purposes. Private buildings are mainly for business and residence. Churches form a class by themselves.

With very few exceptions the public buildings of the Western States have been erected within the lifetime of the present generation. Those which are exceptional reflect the tendency so general in the early days of the Republic to adopt Greek types in architecture, and were carried out in whatever material proved to be handy, without regard to structural propriety. Many of these have been superseded, within the memory of man, by modern structures; and in fact there are no public buildings over thirty years of age which are now suited to the purposes for which they were intended.

The prevalent custom of public architectural competitions has resulted in the selection of architects for these buildings whose talents are below the average. It is needless here to discuss the competition question, except so far as its results are concerned. But it is a fact, that very seldom do the best architects enter such contests, and the choice of designs being controlled by men whose only abilities are in the field of politics, it is generally a matter of chance whose design is accepted; and those which please the eye the most are such as happen to be suited to the comprehension of the intellectual mediocrities who sit in judgment on them.

In the styles of architecture employed in public buildings in the West there is as yet no evidence of any tendency toward a national style, of which we see evidences in private architectural works everywhere. To prevent any misunderstanding as to what is meant by national style, I will explain that it is the tendency of a number of architects—whether working in concert or not—to follow nearly uniform principles in construction and design, uncontrolled by the traditions of previously existing styles. I say uncontrolled, though I think they may be *influenced*, a word of less comprehensive import. Of such is the prevalent tendency in domestic and commercial architecture to employ straight lintels placed flush with the walls and in connection with horizontal band courses; also continuous sills and visible bond courses in piers, cornices for wall protection only, and not for shadow effects; and, generally, ornamentation of the *surface* of walls and *within* the surface plane. The design of such buildings, though it has little in common with any historical style, has been largely *influenced* by the study of mediæval Gothic architecture and the works of Viollet-le-Duc, which have had such extensive circulation in this country. I shall have occasion to speak of this tendency of domestic architecture in another place.

The architecture of our public buildings has simply been ringing the changes on the styles of Greece and Rome, but more especially upon those of Rome. The architects call it Renaissance, but it has little in common with the historical Renaissance of Italy or France. It has more in common with the so-called "Italian" of England, which has been in favor from the days of Inigo Jones and Wren to the Gothic revival of our own time. It received its greatest impetus from the erection of Saint Paul's, and its latest from the London club-houses. England never had a *Renaissance* of classic architecture. She simply copied the works done in that name by the architects of Italy and France. The nearest approach to it was the picturesque combinations of classic details with Gothic forms of the time of James I. and Elizabeth, now called Jacobean, and revived to cater to fashionable tastes. But even that style, if style it may be called, was inspired by the picturesque and artistic late flamboyant and early Renaissance of Normandy and Flanders.

Considering the average intelligence of the brains through which Greek and Roman details have been sifted in order to evolve the designs of our public buildings in the West, we might conclude that the merits and demerits of these buildings, as works of architecture, were not worth serious discussion. So far as their value as actual monuments is concerned, this is so. But their size and prominence, combined with that attribute to which the public attach so much importance, their cost, and the fact that many will stand for ages in their respective localities without rivals in these qualifications for popular renown, have given them such a position in the public eye, that, in spite of all that may be said, they will always stand as public educators of the most powerful sort.

The earliest were—like the old public buildings of the Eastern States erected after the last war with England—attempts to revive the Temple architecture of Greece. The latest are dubbed Neo-Grec, and are in truth *copied out of French books* containing illustrations of the modern French work of the Second Empire, which followed the innovations of Labrouste. With both, and with all the intermediate styles, the dome has been introduced almost without exception. Ten years ago mansard roofs came to be considered as essential to all public as well as private buildings, but they have now fallen into disfavor. The State-House at Springfield, Ill., representing an expenditure of three and a half millions, and still unfinished, has mansard roofs on the two wings only, for want of any other place to put them. For the main cornice is on one level, and the central building is covered by a dome; consequently the mansards are built up above the actual top of the building.

The most prominent public building now in course of erection in the Western States is the twin public building of the city of Chicago. It occupies an entire square in the centre of the city, and will cost when completed in the neighborhood of four million dollars. It consists of two structures almost exactly the same in design, but differing slightly in the materials used. One half is for county purposes and the other is for the use of the city government. Each building has one long front and two short ones. But they are to be connected at the ends by large arches covering the approaches to interior courts, and in the centre by a rotunda common to both buildings. In this twin building, the arrangement of which for county and city purposes is novel, no mansard roofs have been introduced. But in one important respect it makes a departure from the vernacular public building,—it will have no dome. And the reason why it will have none is that public opinion, and nothing else, has condemned the idea. A dome, or rather domical tower, was designed to stand where the rotunda is now to be placed, and the work was actually commenced. But the agitation of the question of dome or no dome was so long continued, that it became the theme of popular conversation in the city. And when the people talked, they naturally began to inquire as to the proprieties of the matter, without regard to precedents. Two arguments prevailed: one was that a dome would be of no practical use; and, inasmuch as it would be purely an ornamental appendage if erected, it was found that it would be more than useless, for the reason that it could not be seen to advantage

from the streets of the city. The argument in favor of economy certainly had weight in preventing the erection of a great and costly dome, but it is doubtful whether it would have been vetoed, had not a popular agitation resulted in making evident the absurdity of erecting a dome that was of no use, and could not be seen except from the suburbs. So here we have a case in which popular opinion has had a direct influence upon the design of the most prominent building in a large city. There can be no doubt but that the example will become a precedent, and it is safe to predict that this structure will mark an important departure in the use of domes on public buildings. The decision in this case was doubtless influenced by the present condition of the dome on the unfinished State-House at Springfield, Illinois, a building which the present generation will not be likely to see finished, and which another generation will have too much good taste to complete.

The new State-House at Des Moines, Iowa, has a dome of iron and copper, just completed, and of small dimensions, suggesting in a measure a decreased sense of the importance of domes generally. The State of Indiana has just commenced its new Capitol, which is designed to have a dome of stone and iron. It will be many years in course of erection, and may prove to be the last of the domical State capitols. All these buildings are in the American Renaissance style. They are all costly and elaborate.

Thus far no State or county building in the Western States has been erected in any other style. But there is a class of public buildings, of which a large number have been erected of late years, in which a greater originality of style and more perfect adaptability to their purpose has been displayed. These are what may be generically termed "public institutions," erected for various charitable purposes.

The great improvements lately made in the management of public institutions, such as hospitals and insane asylums, the introduction of machinery for performing much of the labor required in their care and maintenance, and improved systems of heating, ventilating, lighting, and cooking, have all contributed toward giving a utilitarian character to such establishments. And this has not failed to have a direct influence upon their architecture. The disposition of the buildings with reference to giving them the best positions for obtaining light and air, and their arrangement to meet the several conveniences of communication, have brought them into picturesque groupings. The necessity for having tall chimneys and ventilating shafts has led to the treatment of such necessary accessories in an artistic manner, giving them prominence rather than attempting to hide them. Clocks are desirable on such buildings, and hence clock towers are introduced, while other towers are required for water tanks.

For such requirements the old conventional forms of classic architecture are inappropriate: hence architects have exercised more freedom in architectural treatment. But still another influence has been felt in the erection of such structures, which is found in the materials of construction employed. When it is proposed to erect a State-house or a city hall, the design is first made, and the material is procured to carry out the design. In such cases it is not thought inappropriate to send to great distances for stones of a certain color or texture, while those which might be equally appropriate, and to which the designs could be readily adapted, are to be found in the vicinity. Thus the granite for the Cincinnati Custom-House is brought from Maine, and stone for the Chicago Custom-House is brought from the vicinity of Cincinnati. In the case of the erection of asylums and hospitals, the appropriations are generally small at first, and the necessity for economy compels the adoption of a stone which is near at hand. The designs must be adapted to such stone, hence the buildings are likely to have a character in consonance with the qualities and possibilities of the stone employed. The history of architecture, through all time, shows that the best architectural forms have always been developed from a necessity to work in a given material. Still there is another reason why the public institutions of the West are more elastic in design than all others. It is found in the fact that so many are built of brick. The use of bricks has always given architects great free-



dom in design. The use of a material which is generally considered to have no beauty in itself, has always led designers to seek beauty in the disposition of masses rather than details.

Taking all these circumstances together, we find good reason for the fact, that a decided improvement has taken place of late years in the design of public buildings of this class. This result has come from natural and legitimate causes, and whether such works have been intrusted to architects of ability and education, or to the average of those who may be found in the Western States, they have been architecturally more satisfactory than the more pretentious court-houses and State capitols. The style commonly called Gothic, but which has only a vague resemblance to historical examples of that style, has lately predominated in buildings of this class. The best of them are those in which ideas of style have been least prominent, and in all of them there is evidence of a tendency toward a national architecture. It is useless in the limits of this paper to name any number of these buildings. From the very nature of their objects they are of necessity isolated structures, often built in places where they are seen by few persons beside the residents of the neighboring city or village. Hence as standing examples of architectural art they can exert but a limited influence as public educators.

It is in the large cities that architectural examples are "seen and read." And in these the most predominant are private buildings. They may be broadly classified as business buildings and residences. Business buildings in the large Western cities have, until very recently, been copies of those in New York and Boston. Western architects have only copied the exteriors of the works of their Eastern neighbors. They have failed to adopt the thorough systems of *building* for which New York especially is justly noted. Their works have been showy shells, often covering rotten meat. They have copied only that which is least meritorious in their examples. Up to the time of the great fire in Chicago the stone buildings of that city and St. Louis, the largest, and, to travellers, most prominent of the Western cities, were as a class constructed internally in a manner that no Eastern contractor would risk and no Eastern architect would accept, either as to materials or workmanship. A marked improvement in this respect has taken place in Chicago; but it is still far behind New York except in one particular, the thickness of walls employed. St. Louis has improved but little. Cincinnati has always been the best-built city in the West, and can now show more business structures of good construction and appropriate exterior design than either of the others mentioned. San Francisco, to which our eyes are so often turned for the development of American ideas, unaffected by foreign influences, is what Chicago was fifteen years ago, a city of unsubstantial glitter.

The constructive element is important in considering the development of architecture in business buildings, because the main desideratum to be considered in their erection is strength. Where this receives due consideration we may always see a tendency in the right direction. But strength masked by bad art, as may be seen in so much of the business architecture of New York, contributes nothing to architectural progress. In strength made evident to the senses we find the first dawn of architecture. The better it is expressed, the better the art. It is the artistic expression given to construction which distinguishes architecture from engineering. To decorate construction in a business building is a dangerous practice, but admissible to a certain degree. Moderation in this is the true architect's jewel. As elaboration in design has been the main fault in our business structures, simplicity is the condition to be sought for. Whatever tendency such buildings may have to express their fitness for their several purposes, by convincing us that they have been made strong enough in a natural way, is good so long as simplicity in ornamentation is adhered to. There are a few examples of such buildings in the Western cities, mostly in Cincinnati and Chicago. Their main characteristics are absence of all projections except of window-sills and at the cornice, and the latter made very slight, squareness of openings, vertical lines of main piers made predominant, horizontal lines made by bond courses, iron-work made very plain, and cornices of solid material. The style has been used in

Chicago in many business buildings of moderate size and cost, and in a few of greater pretensions. A store now erecting on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Monroe Street is a good example. Shillito's store in Cincinnati is the most important store building of the kind that has been erected. Good examples may also be found in Detroit, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee.

Dwelling-house architecture has only within a very few years made a departure from what the *American Architect* calls the "vernacular style." The conventional "brown-stone front" of New York, and the bald brick and marble front of Philadelphia, have had but little influence upon the dwelling-house architecture of Western cities. The "swell fronts" of Boston have however been extensively copied. Used as they have been in Chicago and St. Louis on two-story houses mostly, they present less objectionable street perspectives than those of Boston, where such houses, three and four stories in height, are built in long rows, suggesting corrugated walls. In Western cities, even where land is dearest, the dwellings are lower and deeper than in those of the East; while to houses of any pretension there is generally allotted an air space on one side or both. This willingness on the part of property owners to be more liberal in the use of land has given better opportunities for design in domestic architecture, while on the other hand, by reason of the increased cost of houses with exposed sides, the owners have been obliged to economize in the exterior expense. It is noticeable that, whenever parties build for their own use in solid blocks, the fronts are always more expensive in material and more elaborate in design. A man naturally expects to have a given amount of house for the same amount of money, whether his appropriation is expended on three fronts or one. It is evident, therefore, that the isolated house always gives greater opportunities for design. The existence of a great many in any one city conduces to variety, while monotony in design always accompanies the erection of houses in blocks. In the West a larger proportion of houses are built for their owners; and as every one has either caprice, good taste, bad, or whatever his freak of fancy may be called, we find in this another reason for the variety in design in the houses of such cities. The speculative builder has never found such a field for his genius in the West as in the East. Wherever he operates, he builds the maximum of house on the minimum of lot. In New York he actually sets the fashions, but in the West he has not yet become an autocrat. There he builds houses of moderate pretensions in dozens and half-dozens only. But, as in the East, they are always in solid blocks. He generally employs an architect, a practice almost unknown with such people in the East, where it is customary to borrow the copy of some architect's elevation used by himself or his friend in executing a contract. His fronts partake of the prevailing tendencies in design. His buildings only differ from those erected by contract, in that he taxes his ingenuity for cheap methods of doing his inside work. His influence upon architectural progress is as yet but slight.

Dwelling-house architecture in the West has partaken largely of the prevailing tendency to employ so-called Gothic details. A step in advance of this has, however, been made by some architects, in adopting a constructive style best adapted to the materials employed, and setting aside all precedents in the use of detail. The Gothic influence has been most largely felt in these works, but its details are not reproduced. The style is characterized by simplicity in treatment, the almost entire absence of projections from walls, the use of square openings spanned by lintels, and continuous sill and lintel courses. The most expensive and ornate dwellings show a more decided leaning toward the modern English Gothic style, both in general forms and in details. High roofs with gables and elaborate dormers are used, by which effective sky lines are obtained. These buildings show a decided improvement in design over the two-story houses with "swell fronts," mansard roofs, and dormer windows. Formerly, when it was desired to provide a home for some wealthy householder, the only variation from the vernacular style just described consisted in placing rooms on both sides of an entrance hall, and making thereby a double "swell front."

While that indescribable style of house building which we term "the vernacular," still prevails to a great extent through the large Western cities, the attempts of the architects to emancipate themselves from it have in some cases led to the introduction of the modern French academic style, treated with considerable freedom. As a modification or improvement on the "vernacular," it is a step in advance, but has none of the characteristics of a natural style suited to our necessities and adapted to our building materials. In interior decoration a greater improvement is seen than in external architecture. Eastern influences have prevailed through the introduction of Eastern work, which is transportable. But the quantity of imported work is inconsiderable, as the West is quite as quick in finding ways to do its own work as the East is. Its artists and artist-workmen are apt in receiving new ideas and in developing them in new forms, and have even sent their products to Eastern markets.

In church architecture the West has made less progress than in any other branch of the art. It is safe to say that the development of church architecture in America has only received encouragement from one religious denomination, the Protestant Episcopal Church, and that denomination is less numerous, proportionally, than any other. It seems to be the only Church that values architecture as an adjunct to religious teaching. Its clergy are intelligent amateurs. Its relationship to the Church of England makes dear to it all the hallowed associations of that Church, and it claims mediæval architecture as its own. This denomination is not wealthy in the West, and consequently its buildings and its influence are not prominent. But wherever the latter has been felt, it has been attended with good results.

The average Western church of the better class is a combination of a lecture hall, a school, and a club-house. It is a congregational home for social as well as didactic purposes. In one respect Western churches are more complete than those of other localities; and in this they give evidence of the advance of civilization, if not of æsthetics. They are always well heated and ventilated. They are thoroughly comfortable, and even luxurious. They are, as ministers have been proud to claim, homelike. And perhaps this is a good quality in a country where home ties are less firm than in the East, where the population is less permanent, and where there are so many persons whose homes are far away. It is natural, therefore, that among such congregations the value of architecture as an aid to religious inspiration should be little appreciated, and utilitarian matters should be of first concern. With these reflections, it seems hardly necessary to consider in detail the present position of church architecture in the West in its relation to the present condition of the art. It will in time develop new ideas, which will be worthy of future consideration.

It may be said in conclusion, that, notwithstanding the crudities and abominations which exist everywhere, as it is perfectly natural that they should, among new communities, like those of many of our Western cities, the present condition of architectural art in them is healthy. Though but few examples of good work may be seen, we may judge best of the present tendencies by that which is now going on and projected. The popular mind in the West seems more inclined to consider that architecture is an art in which the comfort, well-being, and æsthetic education of all is concerned, and not as a matter which cannot be understood, and is therefore to be treated with indifference. The daily papers give it great prominence, and have done much to make its importance known. The fact that the *Chicago Times* of November 2d, 1879, devoted an entire page to a carefully written essay on architecture, in which the prevailing faults of the buildings of that city were freely criticised, is a recognition of the value and importance of popularizing the art, which should be applauded by all its votaries. Heretofore architectural criticism has been almost unknown. When the daily press treats the subject in a popular way and with discrimination, architectural development in the West will be subject to another potent influence, which cannot fail to be fraught with good results.

P. B. WIGHT.